

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 5, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama,

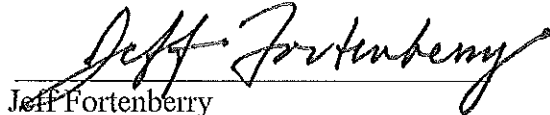
As Members of Congress who are deeply concerned about human rights and religious freedom, we are writing to urge the prompt appointment of an Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. Ambassador Suzan Johnson Cook led commendable efforts as a resolute advocate. We look forward to building on her outreach to political and religious leaders throughout the world to consolidate religious freedom as an integral element of American foreign policy.

At a time when virulent persecution of religious minorities, especially in fragile regions of the Middle East and Africa, threatens to undermine U.S. policy goals and principles of justice, we ask you to strengthen the visibility of the International Religious Freedom Office within the Department of State. We urge you to appoint a career ambassador with extensive knowledge of regional challenges, who can work closely with Secretary Kerry to ensure that religious freedom is represented as an integral element of U.S. diplomacy.

Established on a foundation of religious freedom and freedom of conscience, the United States is seen as a carrier of hope for struggling peoples throughout the world. Moreover, the unprecedented challenges of the 21st century demand that we respond creatively to evidence linking religious freedom and international security. This linkage has been demonstrated poignantly through the work of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. Countries that protect religious freedom are characterized by "more vibrant political and democratic institutions, rising economic and social well-being, diminished tension and violence, and greater overall stability." We hope you will give quick consideration to prioritizing religious freedom policies, especially toward communities working courageously to overcome painful legacies of wrongful religious discrimination and trauma wrought by violent extremism. We also look forward to working with you to intensify our efforts to uphold the vision set forth in the *International Religious Freedom Act of 1998*, which established religious freedom as a priority for U.S. foreign policy.

The signals that we send regarding our support for emerging civil societies are carefully noticed, both by those who are working to establish the institutional foundations of economic and social progress grounded in freedom, and by those who use violence and intimidation to threaten such nascent efforts. We thank you for considering our concerns and ask you to continue the momentum to advance religious freedom that Ambassador Cook worked hard to elevate through U.S. diplomacy.

Sincerely,


Jeff Fortenberry
Member of Congress


Juan Vargas
Member of Congress


Trent Franks
Member of Congress


Dan Lipinski
Member of Congress


Joseph Pitts
Member of Congress